

We are studying Genesis and today we come to probably one of the great men in church history. It is hard to imagine anybody not knowing who Noah was, although last week when DJ and Christy Johns were here they said that they spoke with young people in Brazil who had no idea, and in Portugal who had no idea who Noah was. The rate with which humanity is forgetting the truths of God is stunning, and you and I should be aware of that and of its implications. Noah was a righteous man. He was one righteous man. That is highly significant. You find the story of Noah in Genesis 6:8-9, but I am chopping it off at verse 24 of chapter 7. The way it begins is the way that Moses begins a number of the breaks as he gives the progressive history of the early age of the church and then later on of the first man called to be in a covenant relation with God. He says, *“These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation.”* And then that wonderful phrase [is given], *“Noah walked with God.”*

The significance of Noah as Moses writes about him is really found in what Moses had already written regarding the state of the world in which Noah lived. It was one in which humanity had become so corrupted that God decides to wipe [then] out and start all over again. I encourage you to have your scriptures open and look at Genesis 6:5. *“The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that – here is the part to track with – every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”* You ought to meditate on that verse for a while, and try and draw into your understanding what that generation must have been like. What that says about – and here is the next step – the capacity of the human heart and mind for evil! Let me read it again: *“The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”* You just have to say, “Oh! Heaven forbid!”

What is meant by this, reflecting on this, is what is described and is almost always misunderstood as the doctrine of depravity, the depravity of man. What does it mean to say that humanity is depraved? The doctrine does not teach that all persons at all times are always as evil as they can be. You and I both know that is not true. What it does say is this: all persons in whatever they do are influenced by the selfish and faithless desires and thoughts of their hearts, and they are as it were always slightly off-center from true righteous, purity and devotion to the good of others: always. We experience this on a daily basis. We know that things that begin well rarely end well. Think about a number of relationship that you have been in. As we begin those relationships all seems fine, and then at some point we begin to encounter elements and realities in that other person that make us step back and they are experiencing the same. We have many resources with which we overcome this, but we must understand the underlying truth of it, because if we don't we will not understand the grace of God.

We should remember that Noah was not the only or the first man to enjoy a special relationship with God. Moses has already written to us of a man named Enoch. In Genesis 5:24 – we looked at this a little bit last week – we are told that *“Enoch walked with God and he was not, for God took him.”* There are a couple of lessons that we can take from both Enoch and Noah right off the little bit of information that is set in front of us. First, a person can be righteous and walk with God regardless of the state of the world around them. We need to know that; we need to hear that; we need to repeat that to ourselves so that we don't allow ourselves to become so oppressed of the evil around us that we despair of remaining faithful to God. The Medieval Catholic Church did many wrong things, but one of the right things that they did is they said that despair is a sin. To give yourself over to despair is basically to say to God, your grace is not sufficient; it will not sustain me through the dark shadows I have presently to walk. That is a denial of the sufficiency of the grace of God. We don't want to do that. We do not want to despair.

I have an insert in the bulletin. This insert comes from Break Point and I encourage you to read this. This is an update on the persecution being endured by Christians in many places in the world. We have tried to bring our attention to [this] and we are going to be trying to raise some funds in order to respond to the need of Christians in Syria and Iraq. If you have followed the news as I do, you realize that horrible persecution is occurring against

the Yazidis. Who are they? They are a small number of pagans who follow an ancient religion called Zoroastrianism. I have no complaint against them except that they are not Christians. But beloved whereas less than fifty thousand of them exist, nearly over three hundred thousand Christians have been driven out of Iraq, and you hear nary a word. This little insert is to help us reflect upon the fact that we live in a culture where the dominant cultural voices, the media, ignore Christianity and would be happy if it disappeared. But we must remember that a person can be righteous and walk with God regardless of the state of the world around them.

We have no way of knowing if or how much different things were for Noah than they were for Enoch. They were a few generations apart, although I think it would be fair to say that things had gotten appreciably worse by the time Noah is alive because evil tends to feed upon itself and deepens its own corruption. But it is important for us to recognize that both of these men were able to walk with God. So the counsel of the lesson that we can take from that is that rather than simply complaining or lamenting about how evil things are in our day, you and I should concentrate on our own personal walk of faith. Specifically, [we should concentrate on] our walk with God and God’s people. The amazing thing about these two men is that they walked alone as far as we can see. You and I do not have to do that. We are nested – use the term on purpose – we are nested into a family of believers. We can draw great strength, find comfort and guidance from one another and we should. God is willing to walk with us. That is the amazing thing. In order to pick up on a bit of Genesis 2 and 3, God will meet us in the garden of our lives, wherever we are; He will meet with us if we are willing to pace ourselves down and open ourselves up to His presence, and say, “Please, Father, walk with me; I wish to walk with you.” A lesson from those two remarkable, ancient saints.

There is another lesson here. Looking at Enoch and Noah, I think we are sort of introduced to a question that comes up. In fact I talked with a gentleman that I will not point out in any particular way. He understandably made a drastic mistake. You know what a picky person I am; I am fundamentally a Pharisee and so I notice every detail. What he said was that he was so appreciative that I would allow him to come to my church. I was gracious and I said, well maybe! But beloved, whose church is this? It is Jesus’ church, and the gentleman who spoke with me knows that, but we should never forget it. This is Jesus’ church, God’s church. Why that is important is because what this church is and what it does is governed by this book [the Bible] and not by my opinion. That is why I invite you on a constant basis to listen carefully and find out if I say something wrong – I don’t. . . [Laughter] You know that I do. On occasion I have told the elders, and my wife on a constant basis, that is. . . You have no idea what it means for me to sit and type the transcript of my own sermons, because I hear everything that I say, and it is [the case that] I sometimes say things that nobody should ever say! I am amazed that you people sit out there and listen. I am a human being and say things that I shouldn’t say now and then. Fortunately occasionally I say something that is worth listening to.

What we are encountering here is that God does not and obviously is not constrained to treat everyone in the same way. That may seem like a perfectly obvious statement, but it runs counter to our current impassioned insistence on God treating everybody equally: everybody deserves an equal this and an equal that. Our government tries to do the same things. There are massive problems with equality becoming a prime value in any culture. Number one is that it runs against all natural relations. Number two, it argues with God, and it is not wise to argue with God.

After 365 years, God took Enoch to be with Him in heaven. That is one of the happy statements in scripture. [It is glorious!] How many of us are waiting for that moment? [This is] not death; just being taken. That is worth anticipating. So I am in the Enoch crowd! But what did God do to Noah? After Noah was 500 years old he had three (more) sons and God gave him a task of staggering proportions. I am going to read what God asked him to do when he was 500 years old and he now has at least 3 sons – and I think he had many others, but that is only my opinion. Genesis 6:13-18.

“And God said to Noah, ‘I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopher wood. Make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark 300 cubits, its breadth 50 cubits, and its heights 30 cubits. Make a roof for the ark and finish it to a cubit above, and set the door of the ark in its side. Make it with lower, second, and third decks. For behold I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you.”

How is that for a retirement program?

Enoch walked with God...[gone]! Noah walked with God...[massive assignment]! God does not treat everybody the same. Moses is clear that Enoch had sons and daughters enough. Methuselah was the most memorable, a man who lived longer than all the rest. I would take that as some sort of complement. When Methuselah was 187, he fathered a child. Assuming it was his first Enoch had 113 more years to live. God gave him no further assignment. I wonder if God let Enoch know of the impending judgment which would bring all those children to death. You might wonder how many of the patriarchs did know. Did Noah tell them? Did God? We don't know. In fact I wonder if Noah saw things the way God did. It is hard to imagine, isn't it, a father and grand-father seeing his children as death worthy.

You and I should be conscious that there are many forces that tend to shape us. It is called social consensus. Social consensus works powerfully to alter our perceptions so that barely recognizing it our values and our priorities shift. I wonder if that is playing a part in the lives of the children of Noah as well as the children of Enoch? In a recent message I noted that God's grace often differs from ours in that His never compromises His commitment to righteousness and justice whereas all too often ours does. Then what happens when our compassions weaken our perception of righteousness, is that this leads inevitably to compromise, confusion and even corruption in us as well as in others. This is all because of compassion. Under the power of social consensus a tender heart can be moved, shaped, rearranged without being sensible regarding what it is that is being altered. I believe that that is what happened in the matter of divorce. In case you are a visitor today you need to know that this is a topic I already introduced earlier in this series beginning with Genesis I.

What happened with divorce? Who of us wants to trap someone in situations of unrelieved unhappiness? Even you Pharisaical pastor doesn't want to do that! Who of us isn't eager to extend mercy and hope to those entangled, ensnared, in such relentlessly grievous relationships? But these desires, this compassion in our hearts, under the force of social consensus soon replaced commitment to the sanctity of marriage as a covenant of faith made before God. Without thinking about it, our perceptions and values shifted along with those of our culture and we came to see marriage in a very different way than scriptures do. We saw marriage as first of all about the happiness and fulfillment of the married couple and only secondarily did we see it as a committed relationship primarily concerned with having and raising godly children. In this process as a culture and as a church we forgot the words of Malachi 2:15, *“Did not the Lord make them one with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the Lord seeking: godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit and let none of you be faithless in regard to the wife of your youth.”* Oh! What was God seeking when John met Nancy and we proceeded to wed? He was not primarily seeking the happiness and fulfillment of John and Nancy. He was seeking godly offspring. That was the first thing He looked for. Have John and Nini received happiness and fulfillment? O yeah, richly so, fabulously so, amazingly so! Godly offspring! What has happened to our committed stand for marriage? When children disappear as a primary concern or objective, what you have left is two people dedicated to each other's happiness and well-being. May they find it in God's sweet embrace.

I read another article, another Break Point article and the comments I just shared with you are by no means limited to myself. This is what Eric Metaxas wrote. “We’ve all been shocked by the barbarism we’ve seen committed in the name of Islam. But what about the respectable barbarism we see around us every day? It is pretty clear when a worldview is barbaric, because worldviews have feet. They reveal themselves in the real world. We saw it the other day when the Islamic State or ISIS beheaded the American Journalist James Foley. ISIS then posted the video for a shocked world to see. Only the most depraved, fanatical person would label such behavior as morally correct. But what about the respectable barbarism—you know, the kind that wears a suit, gives snappy interviews, and carries an advanced degree? I’m speaking of the famous British atheist Richard Dawkins, who caused quite a stir the other day when he said that it would be immoral not to abort a fetus with [Down Syndrome]?” There is a moral standard for you. Please understand, “According to Lifesite News, 99% of respondents with [Down Syndrome children] say they are happy” with those children. Nevertheless 90% of people without those children when asked agreed with abortion. Are we barbarians?

One commentator pointed out that Moses indicated in verse 9 of chapter 6 where he is writing about the generations of Noah that he is not writing a history of the flood. That is helpful for us to remember. We learn as much about the flood as we need in order to understand the story of Noah. How many of you have questions about the flood? That is a good reason to get saved: the only Person who can answer your questions is God.

What was the world like in Noah’s day? In Genesis [6]:12 we read this: “*And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, ‘I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them.’*” Violence: violence is very offensive to us. We recoil from violence, unless of course it is a form of entertainment, in which case we eat it up, telling ourselves it makes no difference and it will not damage our sensibilities nor will it corrupt our souls. Violence: It is important for us to appreciate that moral behavior is generally characterized by restraint, restriction and the redirection of our desires. By the way that is a definition of motherhood, particularly if you are raising boys! Let me it clear for the record: boys are violent, girls are sneaky. Ah! Three precious little girls are down here and one long-suffering mom!

It is worth noting that the implication that the corruption of all flesh can also be named as violence. This should not surprise us. As I said, moral behavior is generally characterized by restraint, the restriction and redirection of our desires. Why? So that our desires do not impel us or lead us to action that is out of bounds or more to the point, to actions that ignore the needs and rights of others, [actions] which are self-serving or harmful. If you have raised small children you know that ignoring the needs of others is what they do, and you have to retrain them so they become aware of the fact that the person next to them is a person and not simply the object of their passing whimsy.

When Moses gives an account a little later on of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18-19, we begin to sense the reality of the contagious character of sin, the loss of restraint. When Moses speaks about Sodom and Gomorrah he specifies the unrestrained and destructiveness of their sexual behavior. Most of us are aware of that. Whether it begins with indulging one appetite or another, such sin is contagious. But much later on Ezekiel describes the same situation. He however does it with different terms. In Ezekiel 16:49-50 he says this, “*Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it.*” What was the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah? We like to say it was improper sexual behavior. But what Ezekiel says is that it was leisure, wealth, hardness of heart, haughtiness of spirit such that they didn’t give a rip about anything except their own pleasures. And when a culture is given over to their own pleasures where do you think they go? They go to corrupted sexual satisfaction. It has been demonstrated over and over. So, re we surprised about where we are at, beloved? What Ezekiel names are the sins of hardheartedness and self-regard without compassion for others.

We can assume that the state of things was far worse than in the days of Enoch or the days of Sodom and Gomorrah when God resolved to destroy all humanity excepting only Noah and the sons named along with their wives and the beasts of the field and the livestock and the creeping things. It is possible that Shem, Ham and Japheth were Noah's only children. That is possible; many people have that opinion. I don't think it is true. I think they were simply that they are the three who listened to their father. They were the three sons that showed some element both of submission and faith or trust. However you can imagine what happened to that trust and how it was tested once Noah asked them to help build the ark. The fact that no ark had been built before is a reasonable assumption. That the arts and skills needed for building something like an ark were well developed and well known is also a reasonable assumption. We should never assume that the generations before the flood, the generation of Noah was primitive in some sense even if it was one that we would consider not technologically advanced. Still it was one which no doubt had accomplished great things. We are told that they did. We know from chapter 4, though I have not yet dealt with it, that metallurgy as well as the making of tents and animal husbandry and musical instruments of various types had been developed already, beginning with the sons of Lamech. To build the ark Noah and sons had to have saws and planers, and if want to know anything else they needed talk to Wayne Hosman because I don't know anything else about handling wood! But they had to have it, and so they did. They also needed some means for transporting lots of lumber, including heavy beams. To caulk every seam in the ark with pitch, hmm. . .

The peculiarities of the ark were surely eye catching, not so much I think because it was a boat – did they even know what a boat was? That has been disputed. Why would the ark be eye-catching? Because it was big. But I suspect that Noah talked about it. I suspect it was not, you see, the ark itself but the reason for the ark which attracted the attention and most assuredly the mockery of Noah's neighbors. We know that there were already at this time the “mighty men of renown” on the earth. We know as well that men with large egos like large-scale construction projects. Especially if there is the likelihood of violence, wall, towers, gates and such will be built. But what must the neighbors have thought when Noah and sons began stocking this immense structure with endless amounts of food? Had Noah told them of God's plan to have every sort of animal come aboard. Had Noah told them of an impending flood? Had he invited them to believe and come aboard as well? We do not know. What is certain I believe is that Noah's neighbors knew. They knew that Noah and his three faithful sons were acting in faith and obedience to the Lord. I am sure that this amused them. By the way, I use the word “amuse” on purpose. We are never told that anybody took any action to stop Noah, cut off his supplies, deny him workers, cut short his funding. Whatever you would do to stop an offensive [event, project or activity]. They weren't offended; they just thought it was nuts, funny, “Ha, ha!” Social consensus can be a very powerful influence in our lives.

We know that it took Noah something over a hundred years to build the ark and that was a long time; even if you live to be 950 years [old] a hundred years is a long time. We often hear of the thief on the cross who confessed faith in Jesus and received the promise of paradise from Jesus that very day, and we are amazed at that act of grace. He is hanging there on the cross, he said to the other thief we deserve the death we are getting. He says to Jesus, “Remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus says, “You've got it; you are saved.” Hallelujah. But as impressive as that is, I think I am more impressed with Noah. The salvation of any soul is a miracle of God's death-transcending power. But no less and in some ways more wonderful is the work of grace that sustains you over the long journey of obedience. This is what Peter describes in 2 Peter 1:4-8. “. . .[God] has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped [This is important, isn't it; we have been talking about this the whole message till now.] from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. [I hope, I trust, that by the grace of God I am looking out over an assembly of escapees, people who have, by the grace of God through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit escaped from the corruption of evil desires that is true of this age, for that is the affirmation that we receive through the Word of God. So Peter goes on, “For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue

with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” If and as you and I take with utter seriousness the promise given to us in 2 Peter 1:4-8 this congregation can by itself, assuming no other influence for Christ is present in this community, transform the entire life of Oroville. We are not a powerless group of people. We are fully equipped by our God to accomplish the work that God has called us to do. It’s the doing of it that waits. Noah was a man of faith and he was saved by that faith, but it was a faith tested and perfected by enduring obedience. Just between the two of us, I think that one year inside the ark with all those animals was worse than a hundred years standing around outside listening to those people laugh at us! On the other hand my wife would probably been delighted.

As already stated, Moses is writing the story of Noah, not the story of the flood, nor a journalist’s account of local events at the onset of the world’s greatest storm with the reactions of the local population. Have any seen the movie “Noah”? Two things must have amazed the people standing around the ark at some point and begun to excite their underlying fear. The first is what we begin to read about here in chapter 6, verse 20. You have to get the picture. Noah and sons have finished the ark and now they are beginning hauling and hauling food inside and all of a sudden, “...two of every sort shall come in to you to keep them alive.” The animals, you see, Noah and sons did not go out and get them. God brought them. Think about that: this is the ark and suddenly comes [a couple of animals], and then [more] and then [more]! “Whoa, what is going on here?” Remember that this is before the flood and still the animals of the world do not live in terror of man and man is not yet eating them. So there was probably a comfortable familiarity between animals and men. There was no particular reason for animosity. But this would have been very strange, don’t you think? Indeed it would have been. They probably made some sort of joke out of that as well. Remember the triviality of the mind and the heart is the last stage of lostness. You no longer know how to have shame or seriousness about anything. So they were at that stage. But then it began to rain. What did they do when it began to rain? It is highly significant and I suspect you know this and it has often been pointed out, that it was God who closed the door of the ark and sealed it. And that was the end.

We are told three times by Moses regarding the obedience of Noah. Genesis 6:22, “Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him”; in Genesis 7:5, “And Noah did all that the Lord had commanded him”; Genesis 8:15, “They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life. And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded – and to you notice the little pronoun? – as God commanded him. And the Lord shut him in.” The third mentions the central importance of Noah for Moses is here speaking of the animals entering the ark. It is the obedience of Noah that is at issue. The animals go into the ark just as the Lord commanded Noah to have it be. What is laid out for us here, by the way, is one man fulfilling the purposes of God for humanity. You might remember God created us to have rule and to keep the creation. It is an obedient, that is a righteous man that is here fulfilling the purpose of God. We cannot miss the significance that Noah saves not just three sons and four wives, but that he saves the whole life of the earth. And you and I are to do the same. That command has not been rescinded.

The importance of Noah can scarcely be missed in this account or overstated according to what we have been told. Moses, directed by the Holy Spirit in what he writes as part of the eternal word of God drives the point home in the summary statement you can find in Genesis 7:23. There we read that the Lord God (that is the “he”) “...blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens. They were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark.” That is highly significant. Who was left? Noah and those with him. As it was for Noah, the first savior of humanity, so it is now with Christ. Today and for all time those who are saved are those who are with Christ. But that is not a complete parallel. What is the parallel for the ark? Beloved the parallel for the ark is the church. I never know if I should be more saddened or irritated or just grieved over all for people who say, “I’m a Christian, but I

don't go to church.” Probably what is chiefly in their mind is that they don't have to go and sit and listen to somebody like me talk at them. That is an understandable desire, mistaken, but understandable. Far more profound is that they have dis-integrated themselves from the body of Christ. And what does that mean? Well, if you compare it to Noah, it means they are outside of the ark! Beloved, the way God deals with us is that we make a choice. By personal faith we join our present life and hopes for eternal future to Jesus: His death on the cross for our sins. We recognize that Jesus died as the object of God's wrath in judgment against sin: our own. We also understand that that wrath is the beginning of the final holocaust of God's judgment upon all humanity that is outside of the ark. Peter speaks of that holocaust in 2 Peter 3:9-10 we read, *“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting. . .”* we are waiting; we are waiting. . .we are waiting for Jesus. And with Him He will bring a new heaven and a new earth which is full of Noahs, full of righteousness. So my question is, “Are you waiting? And if you are waiting are standing inside or outside of the ark? Because if you are outside of the ark I as a servant of God and a teacher of the Word can give you no comfort.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, Your word is what it is. It is validated above all other things through the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. If we do not believe in that resurrection, we are pitiable fools to try and live a life of holiness. Forgive us for our doubts; sustain us in our uncertainties; renew us in our minds; make us bold in our spirits; pour out Your love afresh in our hearts; and Father by Your grace may we be a welcoming people to draw all who come into the fellowship of faith, inside the ark of the covenant, the covenant, our gracious Father, which Jesus established anew in His blood. We pray in the name of that ark and covenant and blood, even in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application: “One Righteous Man”

1. What in your daily life most challenges your efforts to be a righteous person?

2. How would you state or explain the doctrine human depravity to an adolescent or a non-believer?

3. Does it seem to you that God should treat all people the same? Could you defend God’s not doing so?

4. In what ways has “social consensus” influenced you to change your view of things?

5. Does your view of marriage put interpersonal happiness first or raising godly offspring? Which do you think is Scripture’s teaching?

6. What do you see as the best sort of moral character and how is this demonstrated in action?

7. Have others found your faith and obedience a source of amusement, something to be mocked?

8. Why might it be important that God closed and sealed the door of the ark?

9. What significance is there in recognizing that Noah and the ark are a fulfillment of Genesis 1:26-28?

10. Do you see Noah and the ark as a persuasive model of salvation, picturing Jesus and the church?